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State Superintendent of Schools

# SERVICE-LEARNING

Fact Sheet

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## ***Why is it called service-learning instead of community service or volunteering?***

The term “community service” carries connotations of restitution for committing a non-violent crime. It does not address the vital learning that takes place as a result of participating in service-learning activities.

Volunteering refers to a person demonstrating good will by offering time and energy to address a need and is not a structured learning experience.

## ***What is the service-learning graduation requirement?***

To receive a Maryland High School Diploma, students will complete one of the following:

- 75 hours of student service with preparation and reflection which, at the discretion of the local school system, may begin during the middle grades; or
- A locally designed program in student service that has been approved by the State Superintendent of Schools.

Service-learning experiences should meet all of the Maryland’s Seven Best Practices of Service-Learning:

- Meet a recognized need in the community
- Achieve curricular objectives through service-learning
- Reflect throughout the service-learning experience
- Develop student responsibility
- Establish community partnerships
- Plan ahead for service-learning
- Equip students with knowledge and skills needed for service.

## ***What will my child get out of fulfilling the service-learning requirement?***

Students involved in service-learning typically demonstrate social, personal, and academic growth and development. They increase their teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership skills. Their self-respect increases as they see they can tackle tough problems and succeed. Service-learning also helps them explore their roles as citizens and as active participants in solving community problems.

## ***Won’t this requirement take class time away from the basics?***

Teaching students how to be involved citizens is a basic and has traditionally been one of the primary purposes of public schools. The State Board of Education passed the requirement in an effort to promote both academic achievement and civic engagement.

Service-learning is a method for improving classroom learning. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has endorsed required service-learning.

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***What kinds of projects are students actually doing?***

Each jurisdiction has developed its own service-learning program. Some are making service a part of all social studies classes; others are developing projects in middle school which integrate English, science, math and social studies with service. Local school systems are best equipped to determine what is appropriate for their students. For example:

- “Trees for the Environment.” The American Chestnut Society was looking for school sites that were willing to partner and grow trees that were genetically engineered to produce blight resistant trees. Through Thorpewood Environmental Center, Carroll County students, including the Environmental Club and horticulture classes at North Carroll High School, worked with teachers to participate in Chestnut research and make positive impact on the environment. The groves planted will be used for various secondary projects such as reforestation, riparian stream banks, erosion control, and landscaping. To support the project, a Chestnut curriculum has been developed and introduced into science classes.
- “Slavery to Freedom” Preserving the Sotterley Plantation. The Sotterley Plantation is a national historic site. Eighth graders at Esperanza Middle School in St. Mary’s County completed a “Slavery to Freedom” course in partnership with the plantation. The project was incorporated into students’ social studies, science, language arts, and physical education courses. Students learned the importance of maintaining this local and national treasure for future generations. Letters were sent to local, state, and federal officials to gain support for preserving this site.
- “Veterans Oral Histories Project.” Urbana High School students in Frederick County participated in the National Oral Histories Project. An Act of Congress created a civic project to promote the recordation of Americans’ stories before they are lost forever. The students made contact with veterans from the community and recorded interviews. The students edited the interviews and made copies for the veteran and the school and made one for the county to be cataloged in the Maryland Room and added to the Library of Congress database.

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***How will students receiving special education services be affected by this requirement?***

Special education students have been performing all kinds of service, including planting trees, assisting the elderly, and making wooden toys for day care children. Students receiving special education services are expected to fulfill the graduation requirement, and the majority will do so. A student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team can make changes to a student’s IEP based on the nature and severity of the student’s disability.

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***Who will be responsible to make sure my child meets the requirement?***

Ultimately, your child is responsible for meeting the requirement. Each school system, however, will help by providing opportunities for students to engage in service-learning following Maryland’s Seven Best Practices of Service-Learning and by keeping a cumulative record of students’ service.

For more information, call 410-767-0358 (Baltimore area) or 1-888-246-0016 (toll free) or visit Maryland’s Service-Learning website at [www.MDSERVICE-LEARNING.ORG](http://www.MDSERVICE-LEARNING.ORG)

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